

The Key to Liberation

by Ajahn Chah

The following Dhamma talk was informally given to a visiting scholar monk who had come to pay respects to Venerable Ajahn Chah.

In Buddhism, the primary reason we study the Dhamma (the truth) is to find the way to transcend suffering and attain peace. Whether you study physical or mental phenomena, the *citta* (mind or consciousness) or *cetasika* (mental factors), it is only when you make liberation from suffering your ultimate goal, rather than anything else, that you will be practicing in the correct way. This is because suffering and its causes already exist right here and now.

As you contemplate the cause of suffering, you should understand that when that which we call the mind is still, it's in a state of normality. As soon as it moves, it becomes *sankhara* (that which is fashioned or concocted). When attraction arises in the mind, it is *sankhara*; when aversion arises, it is *sankhara*. If there is desire to go here and there, it is *sankhara*. As long as you are not mindful of these *sankharas*, you will tend to chase after them and be conditioned by them. Whenever the mind moves, it becomes *sammuti-sankhara* - enmeshed in the conditioned world - at that moment. And it is these *sankharas* - these movements of the mind - which the Buddha taught us to contemplate.

Whenever the mind moves, it is *aniccam* (impermanent), *dukkham* (suffering) and *anatta* (not self). The Buddha taught us to observe and contemplate this. He taught us to contemplate *sankharas* which condition the mind. Contemplate them in light of the teaching of *paticcasamuppada* (Dependent Origination): *avijja* (ignorance) conditions *sankhara* (karmic formations); *sankhara* conditions *vinnana* (consciousness); *vinnana* conditions *nama* (mentality) and *rupa* (materiality); and so on.

You have already studied and read about this in the books, and what's set out here is correct as far as it goes, but in reality you're not able to keep up with the process as it actually occurs. It's like falling out of a tree: in a flash, you've fallen all the way from the top of the tree and hit the ground, and you have no idea how many branches you passed on the way down. When the mind experiences an *arammana* (mind-object) and is attracted to it, all of a sudden you find yourself experiencing a good mood without being aware of the causes and conditions which led up to it. Of course, on one level the process happens according to the theory described in the scriptures, but at the same time it goes beyond the limitations of the theory. In reality, there are no signs telling you that now it's *avijja*, now it's *sankhara*, then it's *vinnana*, now it's *nama-rupa* and so on. These scholars who see it like that, don't get the chance to read out the list as the process is taking place. Although the Buddha analyzed one moment of consciousness and described all the different component parts, to me it's more like falling out of a tree - everything happens so fast you don't have time to reckon how far you've fallen and where you are at any given moment. What you know is that you've hit the ground with a thud, and it hurts!

What takes place in the mind is similar. Normally, when you experience suffering, all you really see is the end result, that there is suffering, pain, grief and despair present in the mind. You don't really know where it came from - that's not something you can find in the books. There's nowhere in the books where the intricate details of your suffering and its causes are described. The reality follows along the same course as the theory outlined in the scriptures, but those who simply study the books and never get beyond them, are unable to keep track of these things as they actually happen in reality.

Thus the Buddha taught to abide as 'that which knows' and simply bear witness to that which arises. Once you have trained your awareness to abide as 'that which knows', and have investigated the mind and developed insight into the truth about the mind and mental factors, you'll see the mind as *anatta* (not self). You'll see that ultimately all mental and physical formations are things to be let go of and it'll be clear to you that it's foolish to attach or give undue importance to them.

The Buddha didn't teach us to study the mind and mental factors in order to become attached to them, he taught simply to know them as *aniccam, dukkham, anatta*. The essence of Buddhist practice then, is to let them go and lay them aside. You must establish and sustain awareness of the mind and mental factors as they arise. In fact, the mind has been brought up and conditioned to turn and spin away from this natural state of awareness, giving rise to *sankhara* which further concoct and fashion it. It has therefore become accustomed to the experience of constant mental proliferation and of all kinds of conditioning, both wholesome and unwholesome. The Buddha taught us to let go, you must first study and practice. This is in accordance with nature - the way things are. The mind is just that way, mental factors are just that way - this is just how it is.

Consider *magga* (the Noble Eightfold Path), which is founded on *panna* or Right View. If there is Right View it follows that there will be Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood and so on. These all necessarily involve mental factors, which arise out of the knowing. The knowing is like a lantern. If there is Right Knowing it will pervade every aspect of the path, giving rise to Right Intention, Right Speech and so on, just like the light of the lantern illuminating the path along which you have to travel. In the end, whatever the mind experiences, it must arise from the knowing. If this mind didn't exist, the knowing couldn't exist either. These are the essential characteristics of the mind and mental factors.

All these things are mental phenomena. The Buddha taught that the mind is the mind - it's not a living being, a person, a self, an 'us' or a 'them'. The Dhamma is simply the Dhamma - it's not a living being, a person, a self, an 'us' or a 'them'. There's nothing, which is substantial. Whatever aspect of this individual existence you choose, whether it's *vedana* (feelings) or *sanna* (perception), for example, it all comes within the range of the five *khandhas* (aggregates). So it should be let go of.

Meditation is like a plank of wood. Let's say *vipassana* (insight) is one end of the plank and *samatha* (calm) is the other. If you were to pick the plank up, would just one end come up or would both of them? Of course when you pick up the plank, both sides come up together. What is *vipassana*? What is *samatha*? They are the mind itself. At first the mind becomes peaceful through the practice of *samatha*, through *samadhi* (firmness of mind). By developing *samadhi* you can make the mind peaceful. However, if the peace of *samadhi* disappears, suffering arises. Why does suffering arise? Because the kind of peace which comes through *samatha* is itself *samudaya* (the Noble truth of the Origin of Suffering). It's a cause for suffering to arise. Even though a certain state of peace has been attained, the practice is not yet finished. The Buddha saw from his own experience, that this isn't the end of the practice. The process of becoming is not yet completely exhausted; the conditions for continued birth still exist; the practice of the Holy Life is still incomplete. Why is it incomplete? Because suffering still exists. He thus took up the calm of *samatha* and continued to contemplate it, investigating to gain insight until he was no longer attached to it. Such calm is one kind of *sankhara* and is still part of the world of conditions and conventions. Attaching to the calm of *samatha* means attaching to the world of conditions and conventions, you are attached to becoming and birth. That act of taking delight in the tranquility of *samatha* is becoming and birth. When that restless and agitated thinking disappears through the practice of *samatha*, the mind attaches to the resultant peace, but it's another form of becoming. It still leads to further birth.

The cycle of becoming and birth arose again and, of course, the Buddha was immediately aware of it. The Buddha went on to contemplate the causes behind becoming and birth. As long as he was unable to completely comprehend the truth of this matter, he continued to use the tranquil mind as a means to penetrate deeper and deeper with his contemplation. He reflected upon all formations that arose, whether peaceful or agitated, until eventually he saw that all conditions are like a lump of red hot iron. The five *khandhas* are just like this. When a piece of iron is glowing red hot all over, is there any part of it you can touch without getting burnt? Can there be anywhere at all which is cool? If you tried touching it on the top, the sides, underneath, or anywhere, would you be able to find a single spot which was cool? Obviously there wouldn't be a cool place anywhere, because that lump of iron is red hot all over. Similarly, each of the five *khandhas* is as if red hot to the touch. It's a mistake to attach to calm states of mind, or think that the calm is you or that there is a self, which is calm. If you presume that the calm is you or that there is someone who is calm, this only reinforces the idea that there's a solid entity, a self or *atta*. But this sense is just conventional reality. If you attach to the thought 'I'm peaceful', 'I'm agitated', 'I'm good', 'I'm bad', 'I'm happy' or 'I'm suffering', it means you are caught in more becoming and birth. It's more suffering. When happiness disappears it changes to suffering. If the suffering disappears it becomes happiness. And you get caught endlessly spinning around between happiness and suffering, heaven and hell, unable to put a stop to it.

The Buddha observed that his mind was conditioned in this way and reflected that the causes for becoming and birth were still present and the practice was still unfinished. As a result, he deepened his contemplation of the true nature of *sankharas* because a cause exists, there is accordingly birth and death and these characteristics of movement back and forth in the mind. He contemplated this repeatedly to see clearly the truth about the five *khandhas*. **All physical and all mental phenomena and everything that the mind thinks, are *sankharas*.** The Buddha taught that once you have

discerned this, you'd let them go, you'll naturally give them up. These things should be known as they are in reality. As long as you don't know things in accordance with the truth you have no choice but to suffer. You can't let go of them. But once you have penetrated the truth and understand how things are, you see these things as deluding. This is what the Buddha meant when he explained that really, the mind, which has seen the truth of the way things are is empty, it is inherently unentangled with anything. It isn't born belonging to anyone and it doesn't die as anyone's. It is free. It is bright and radiant, free from any involvement with external affairs and issues. The reason it gets entangled with external affairs is because it's deluded by *sankharas* and the very sense of self.

The Buddha thus taught us to look carefully at the mind. In the beginning what was there? There was really nothing there. The process of birth and becoming and these movements of mind weren't born with it and they don't die with it. When the Buddha's mind encountered pleasant mind-objects, it didn't become delighted with them. Contacting disagreeable mind-objects, he didn't become averse to them - because he had clear knowledge and insight into the nature of the mind. There was the penetrating knowledge that all such phenomena have no real substance or essence to them. He saw them as *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anatta* and maintained this deep and profound insight throughout his practice.

It is the knowing which discerns the truth of the way things are. The knowing doesn't become delighted or sad with things. The condition of being delighted is 'birth' and the condition of being distressed is 'death'. If there is death there must be birth, if there is birth there must be death. This process of birth and death is *vatta* - the cycle of birth and death which continues on endlessly.

As long as the mind of the practitioner gets conditioned and moved around like this, there need be no doubt as to whether the causes for becoming and rebirth still remain; there is no need to ask anyone. The Buddha thoroughly contemplated the characteristics of *sankharas* and as a result could let go of *sankharas* and each of the five *khandhas*. He became an independent observer, simply acknowledging their existence and nothing more. If he experienced pleasant mind-objects, he didn't become infatuated with them, but simply watched and remained aware of them. If he experienced unpleasant mind-objects, he didn't become averse towards them. Why was that? Because he had discerned the truth and so the causes and conditions for further birth had been cut off. The conditions supporting birth no longer existed. His mind had progressed in the practice to the point where it gained its own confidence and certainty in its understanding. It was a mind, which was truly peaceful - free from birth, aging, sickness and death. It was that which was neither cause nor effect; it was independent of the process of causal conditioning. There were no causes remaining, they were exhausted. His mind had transcended birth and death, happiness and suffering, good and evil. It was beyond the limitations of words and concepts. There were no longer any conditions, which would give rise to attachment in his mind. Anything to do with attachment to birth and death and the process of causal conditioning, would be a matter of the mind and mental factors.

Samatha and *Vipassana* must be developed in yourself before you can really know the truth. It's possible to study from the books to gain theoretical knowledge of the mind and mental factors, but you can't use that kind of knowledge to actually cut off greed, hatred and delusion. You have only studied about the external characteristics of greed, hatred and delusion and are simply describing the different features of the defilement's...greed is like this, hatred is like that and so on. You only know as much as their external qualities and superficial appearance, and can only talk about them on that level. You might have developed some awareness and insight, but the important thing is that when the defilement's actually arise in the mind, does it fall under their control and take on their features? For instance, when you encounter an undesirable mind-object, a reaction will occur which leads to the mind taking on certain qualities. Do you attach to that reaction? Can you let go of your reaction? Once you become aware of aversion that has arisen, does 'that which knows' store that aversion in the mind, or having seen it, is 'that which knows' able to let it go immediately?

If having experienced something you dislike, you still store up aversion in the mind, you must take your practice back to square one. Because you are still at fault; the practice is still not perfect. If it reaches the point of perfection, the mind will automatically let things go. Look at the practice in this way. You really have to look deeply into your mind for the practice to become *paccatam*. If you tried to describe the mind and mental factors in terms of the number of separate moments of consciousness and their different characteristics in accordance with the theory, it still wouldn't be nearly enough. The truth has much more to it than this. If you are really going to learn about these things, you must gain clear insight and direct understanding to penetrate them. If you don't have any true insight, how will you ever get beyond theory? There's no end to it. You would have to keep studying it indefinitely.

Thus the practice is thus the most important thing. In my own practice, I didn't spend all my time studying all the theoretical descriptions of the mind and mental factors - I watched 'that which knows'. When the mind had thoughts of aversion I asked, 'Why is there aversion?' If there was attraction I asked, 'Why is there attraction?' This is the way to practice. I didn't know all the finer points of theory or go into a detailed analytical break down of the mind and the mental factors. I just kept prodding at that one point of the mind, until I was able to settle the whole issue of aversion and attraction and make it completely vanish. Whatever happened, if I could bring my mind to the point where it stopped liking and disliking, it had gone beyond suffering. It had reached the point where it could remain at ease,

whatever it was experiencing. There was no craving or attachment...it had stopped. This is what you're aiming for in the practice. If other people want to talk a lot about theory that's their business. In the end, though, however much you talk about it, the practice has to come back to this point. Even if you don't talk much about it, the practice still comes back to this point. Whether you proliferate a lot or a little, it all comes back to this. If there is birth, it comes from this. If there is extinction, this is where the extinction occurs. However much the mind proliferates, it doesn't make any difference. The Buddha called this place 'that which knows'. It has the function of knowing according to the truth of the way things are. Once you have really discerned the truth, you automatically know the way the mind and the mental factors are.

The mind and the mental factors constantly deceive you, never letting up for a moment. When studying about these things, they're deceiving you - there's no other way of putting it. Even though you are aware of them, they are still deluding you right at that moment. This is the way it is. The Buddha didn't intend that you should only know about suffering and the defilement's by name, his aim was for you to actually find the way of practice which will lead you to transcend suffering. He taught to investigate and find the cause of suffering from the most basic to the most refined level. As for myself, I have been able to practice without a great amount of theoretical knowledge. It's enough to know that the Path begins with *sila* (moral restraint). *Sila* is that which is beautiful in the beginning. *Samadhi* is that which is beautiful in the middle. *Panna* (wisdom) is that which is beautiful in the end. As you deepen your practice and contemplation of these three aspects, they merge and become one thing, although you can still see them as three separate parts of the practice.

As a prerequisite for training in *sila*, *panna* must actually be there, but we usually say that the practice begins with *sila*. It's the foundation. It's just that *panna* is the factor that determines just how successful and complete the practice of *sila* is. You need to contemplate your speech and actions and investigate the process of cause and effect - which is all a function of *panna*. You have to depend on *panna* before *sila* can be established.

According to the theory, we say that it's *sila*, *samadhi* and then *panna*; but I've reflected on this and found that *panna* underlies all the other aspects of the practice. You need to fully understand the effects of your speech and actions on the mind and how it is that they can bring about harmful results. Through reasoned reflection you use *panna* to guide, control and thereby purify your actions and speech. If you know the different characteristics of your actions and speech, which are conditioned by both wholesome and unwholesome mental states, you can see the place of practice. You see that if you're going to cultivate *sila*, it involves giving up evil and doing good; giving up doing wrong and doing that which is right. Once the mind has given up doing wrong and has cultivated doing what is right, it will automatically turn inwards to focus upon itself and become firm and steady. When it's free from doubt and uncertainty about speech and actions, the mind will be steadfast and unwavering, providing the basis for becoming firmly concentrated in *samadhi*. This firm concentration forms the second and more powerful source of energy in the practice, allowing you more fully contemplate the sights, sounds and other sense objects which you experience. Once the mind is established with firm and unwavering calm and mindfulness, you can engage in the sustained contemplation of form, feeling, perception, thought and consciousness, and with the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and mind-objects, and see that all of these are constantly arising. As a result you will gain insight into the truth of these phenomena and how they arise according to their own nature. When there is continuous awareness, it will be the cause for *panna* to arise. Once there is clear knowledge in accordance with the true nature of the way things are, your old *sanna* and sense of self will gradually be uprooted from its former conditioning and will be transformed into *panna*. Ultimately, *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna* will merge in the practice, as one lasting and unified whole.

As *panna* strengthens, it acts to develop *samadhi* which becomes steadier and more unshakable. The firmer *samadhi* becomes, the more resolute and complete *sila* becomes. As *sila* is perfected, it nurtures *samadhi*, and the strengthening of *samadhi* leads to a maturing of *panna*. These three aspects of the practice are pretty much inseparable - they overlap so much. Growing together, they combine to form what the Buddha called *magga*, the Path. When *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna* reach their peak, *magga* has enough power to destroy the *kilesa*. Whether it be greed, hatred or delusion which arises, it is only the strength of *magga* which is capable of destroying it.

The Four Noble Truth taught by the Buddha as a framework for practice are: *dukkha* (suffering), *samudaya* (the cause of suffering), *nirodha* (the end of suffering) and *magga* (the path leading to the end of suffering) which consists of *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna* - modes of training which exist in the mind. Although I say these three words - *sila*, *samadhi*, *panna* - out loud, they don't exist externally, they are rooted in the mind itself.

It is the nature of *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna* to be at work continuously, maturing all the time. If *magga* is strong in the mind, whatever objects are experienced - whether they are forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations or thoughts - it will be in control. If *magga* is strong it will destroy the *kilesa*. When it's weak and the *kilesa* are strong, *magga* will be

destroyed. The *kilesa* can destroy your very heart. If mindfulness isn't fast enough as forms, feelings, perceptions and thoughts arise into consciousness, they can destroy you. *Magga* and the *kilesa* thus proceed side by side. The place where you put effort into the practice is the heart. You have to keep sparring with the *kilesa* every step of the way. It's as if there are two separate people arguing inside your mind, but it's just *magga* and the *kilesa* struggling with each other. *Magga* functions to control the mind and fosters your ability to contemplate the Dhamma. As long as you are able to contemplate, the *kilesa* will be losing the battle. But if at any time your practice weakens and the *kilesa* regain their strength, *magga* will disappear and the *kilesa* will take its place. Necessarily, the two sides continue their struggle like this, until eventually there is a winner and the whole affair is settled. If you center your efforts on developing *magga*, it will continue to destroy the defilements. Ultimately, *dukkha*, *samudaya*, *nirodha* and *magga* will come to exist in your heart - that's when you will have really practiced with and penetrated the Four Noble Truths.

Whatever suffering arises, in whatever form, it must have a cause - that is *samudaya*, the second Noble Truth. What is the cause? The cause is that your practice of *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna* is weak. When *magga* is weak, the *kilesa* can take hold of the mind. When they take over the mind, they become *samudaya* and inescapably give rise to different kinds of suffering. If suffering arises it means that the aspect which is able to extinguish suffering has disappeared. The factors which give rise to *magga* are *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna*. When they have reached their full strength, the practice of *magga* will advance inexorably, and will destroy *samudaya* - that which is able to cause suffering in the mind. It is then - when suffering is in abeyance, unable to arise because the practice of *magga* is in the process of cutting through the *kilesa* - that suffering actually dies out in the mind. Why are you able to extinguish suffering? Because the practice of *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna* has reached its highest level, which means that *magga* has reached the point where its progress has become unstoppable. I say that if you can practice like this, it will no longer matter where you have got to in studying the theoretical knowledge of the mind and mental factors, because in the end everything unifies in this one place. If the mind has transcended conceptual knowledge, it will be very confident and certain in the practice, having gone beyond all doubt. Even if it starts to wander off, you won't have to chase it very far to bring it back onto the path.

What are leaves of the mango tree like? It's enough just to pick up one leaf and look at it to know. Even if you look at ten thousand leaves, you won't see much more than you do looking at one. Essentially they are all the same. By looking at one leaf, you can know all mango leaves. If you look at the trunk of the mango tree, you only have to look at the trunk of one tree to know them all. All the other mango tree trunks are the same. Even if there were a hundred thousand of them, I would just have to look at one to really see them all. The Buddha taught to practice Dhamma in this way.

Sila, *samadhi* and *panna* are what the Buddha called *magga* - but *magga* is still not the heart of the Buddha's teaching. It's not an end in itself and wasn't really what the Buddha wanted, just by itself. But it is the way, which leads inwards. It would be like traveling from Bangkok to this monastery, Wat Nong Pah Pong. What you want is to reach the monastery, you don't actually want the road or the tarmac itself. But you'd need to use the road for the journey to the monastery. The road and the monastery are not the same thing - the road is simply the way to the monastery - but you have to follow the road if you want to reach the monastery.

You could say that neither *sila*, *samadhi* nor *panna* form the heart of Buddhism, but they do form the pathway by which the heart of Buddhism can be reached. Once you have practiced with *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna* to the highest level, peace arises as a result. This is the ultimate aim of the practice. Once the mind is calm, even if you hear a sound it doesn't disturb it. Having attained such calm, you no longer create anything in the mind. The Buddha taught letting go. So whatever you experience, you don't have to fear or worry. The practice reaches the point where it is truly *pacatam* and because you have direct insight, you no longer simply have to believe what other people say.

Buddhism is not founded on anything strange or unusual. It doesn't depend on different kinds of miraculous displays of psychic powers or super human abilities. The Buddha did not praise or encourage those things. Such powers might exist and with your practice of meditation it might be possible to develop them, but the Buddha didn't praise or encourage them because they are potentially deluding. The only people he did praise were those beings who were able to free themselves from suffering. To do this they had to depend on the practice - our tools which are *dana* (generosity), *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna*. These are what we have to train with.

These things form the way which leads inwards, but in order to reach the final destination, there must first be *panna* to ensure the development of *magga*. *Magga* or the Eightfold Noble Path means *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna*. It cannot grow if the mind is covered over with *kilesa*. If *magga* is strong it can destroy the *kilesa*; if the *kilesa* are strong they can destroy *magga*. The practice simply involves these two things battling it out until the end of the path is reached. We have to struggle continuously, not ceasing, until the goal is reached.

The tools and supports of the practice are things which involve hardship and difficulty. We must depend on patience and endurance, restraint and frugality. We must do the practice for ourselves, so that it arises from within and really has transformed our own minds.

Scholars however, tend to doubt a lot. When they are sitting in meditation, as soon as there is a little bit of calm they start to wonder if perhaps they have reached first *jhana*. They tend to think like this. But as soon as they start proliferating, the mind turns away from the objects and they become completely distracted from the meditation. In a moment they're off again, thinking that it's second *jhana* already. Don't start proliferating about such matters. There aren't any signposts that tell you which level of concentration you have reached; it's completely different. There are no signs which sprout up and say, 'This way to Nong Pah Pong'. There isn't anything for you to read along the way. There are many famous teachers who have given descriptions of the first, second, third and fourth *jhana*, but this information exists externally in the books. If the mind has really entered into such deep levels of calm, it doesn't know anything about such descriptions. There is awareness, but this is not the same as the knowledge you gain from studying the theory. If those who have studied the theory hang on to what they have learnt when they sit in meditation, taking notes on their experience and wondering whether they have reached *jhana* yet, their minds will be distracted right there and turn away from the meditation. They won't gain real understanding. Why is that? Because there is desire. As soon as *tanha* (craving) arises, whatever the meditation you are doing, it won't develop because the mind withdraws. It is essential that you learn how to give up all thinking and doubting, give it up completely, all of it. You should just take body, speech and mind as it is, as the basis for the practice and nothing else. Contemplate the conditions of the mind, and don't lug the textbooks along with you. There are no textbooks within where you are doing the practice. If you try to take them in there with you, everything goes to waste, because they won't be able to describe how things are as you actually experience them.

People who have studied a lot and have all the theory down pat, tend not to succeed with meditation because they get stuck at the level of information. In actuality, the mind isn't something which you can really measure using external standards or text books. If it's really getting calm, allow it to become calm. In this way it can proceed to reach the very highest levels of tranquility. My own knowledge of the theory and scriptures was only modest. I've already told some of the monks about the time I was practicing in my third rains retreat; I still had many questions and doubts about *samadhi*. I kept trying to work it out with my thoughts and the more I meditated, the more restless and agitated the mind became. In fact it was so bad that I would actually feel more peaceful when I wasn't meditating. It was really difficult. But even though it was difficult, I didn't give up. I kept on practicing, just the same. If I simply did the practice without having many expectations about the results, it was fine. But if I determined to make my mind calm and one-pointed, it would just make things worse. I couldn't work it out. 'Why is it like this?', I asked myself.

Later on I began to realize that it's the same as with the matter of breathing. If you determine to take only short breaths, or to take only medium size breaths, or to take only long breaths, it seems like a difficult thing to do. On the other hand, when you are walking around, unaware of whether the breath is going out, you are comfortable and at ease. I realized that the practice is similar. Normally, when people are walking around and not meditating on the breath, do they ever suffer because of their breathing? No. It's not really such a problem. But if I sat down determined to make my mind calm, it would automatically become *upadana* (attachment), there was clinging in there too. I became determined to force the breath to be a certain way, either short or long, that it became uneven and it was impossible to concentrate or keep my mind on it. So then I was suffering even more than I had been before I started meditating. Why was that? Because my determination itself became attachment. It shut off awareness and I couldn't get any results. Everything was burdensome and difficult because I was taking craving into the practice with me.

On one occasion I was walking *cankama* (walking meditation) sometime after eleven o'clock at night. There was a festival going on in the village, which was about half a mile from the forest monastery where I was staying. I was feeling strange, and had been feeling like that since the middle of the day. I was feeling unusually calm and wasn't thinking very much about anything. I was tired from walking meditation, so I went to sit in my small grass-roofed hut. Then just as I was sitting down, I found I had barely enough time to tuck my legs in before my mind went into this deep place of calm. It happened just by itself. By the time I got myself into the sitting posture the mind was already deeply calm and I felt completely firm and stable in the meditation. It wasn't that I couldn't hear the sounds of people singing and dancing in the village; I could still hear them. But at the same time, I could turn my attention inwards so that I couldn't hear the sounds as well. It was strange. When I paid no attention to the sounds there was silence, I couldn't hear anything. But if I wanted I could hear them and without feeling disturbed. It was as if inside my mind there were two different objects placed side by side, but not connected to one another. I could see that the mind and the object were separate and distinct, just like this water kettle and the spittoon here. As a result I understood that when the mind is calm in *samadhi*, if you direct your attention towards sounds, you can hear them, but if you remain with the mind, in its emptiness, it remains quiet. If a sound arises into consciousness and you watch what happens, you see that the knowing and the mind-object are quite separate.

So I reflected: 'If this isn't it, then what else could be. This is the way it is – the two phenomena aren't connected at all.' I continued to contemplate until I realized the importance of this point: when *santati* (the continuity of things) was broken, the result was *santi* (peace of mind). Formally there was *santati* and now *santi* had emerged from it. The experience of this gave me energy to persist with my meditation. I put intense effort into the practice and was indifferent to everything else, the mind didn't lose its mindfulness even for an instant. If I'd wanted to stop formal practice, was there any laziness, tiredness or irritation? None at all. The mind was completely free from such defilements. What was left was the sense of complete balance or 'just-rightness' in the mind. If I was going to stop, it would just have been to rest the body, not for anything else.

Eventually I did take a break. I just stopped sitting so formally, but the mind didn't stop. It remained in the same state and continued with the meditation as before. I pulled over my pillow and prepared to rest. As I lay down, my mind was still just as calm. As I was about to lay my head on the pillow, the mind inclined inwards – I didn't know where it was headed, but it kept moving deeper and deeper within. It was as if someone had turned on a switch and sent an electric current along a cable. With a deafening bang, the body exploded from the inside. The awareness inside the mind at that moment was at its most refined. Having passed beyond a certain point, it was as if the mind was cut loose and had penetrated to the deepest, quietest spot inside. It settled there in a realm of complete emptiness. Absolutely nothing could penetrate it from outside. Nothing could reach it. Having stayed in there for a while, awareness then withdrew. I don't mean to say that I made it withdraw; I was merely watching – just witnessing what was going on. Having experienced these things, the mind gradually withdrew and returned to its normal state.

Once the mind had returned to normal, the question arose: 'What happened?' The reply came to it was, 'These things are natural phenomena which occur according to causes and conditions; there's no need to doubt about them.' I only needed to reflect a little like this and the mind accepted it. Having paused for a while, it inclined inwards again. I didn't make any conscious effort to direct the mind, it went by itself. As it continued to move deeper and deeper inwards, it hit the same switch like before. This time the body shattered into the most minute and refined particles. Again, the mind was cut loose and slipped deep inside itself. Silence. It was at an even deeper level of calm than before – nothing could penetrate it. Following its own momentum, the mind stayed like that some time and then withdrew as it wished. Everything was happening automatically. There was no one influencing or directing events; I didn't try to make things happen, to enter that state or withdraw from it in any particular way. I was simply keeping with the knowing and watching. Eventually, the mind withdrew to a state of normality, without stimulating any more doubts. I continued to contemplate and the mind inclined inwards again. The third time I had the experience of the whole world completely disintegrating. The earth, vegetation, trees, mountains, in fact the entire planet appeared as *akasa-dhatu* (the space element). There were no people or anything else left at all. At this stage there was complete emptiness.

The mind continued to dwell within on its own peacefully, without being forced. I don't know how to explain how it happened like that, or why. It's difficult to describe the experience or talk about it in a way that anyone else could understand. There's nothing you can compare it with. The last time the mind stayed in that state far longer and then when its time was up, it withdrew. Saying that the mind withdrew, doesn't mean that I was controlling it and making it withdraw – it withdrew by itself. I simply watched as it returned to normal. Who could say what happened on these three occasions? Who could describe it? Maybe there's no need to describe it?

What I have been telling you about here concerns the pure nature of mind as it is experienced in reality. This hasn't been a theoretical analysis of the mind or mental factors. There isn't any need for that. The things which really are needed are confidence in the teachings and the sincerity to keep deepening the practice. You have to put your life on the line. When the time comes, the whole world turns upside down. Your view and understanding of reality is completely transformed. If other people see you at that time, they might think that you're insane. If it happened to someone who couldn't maintain their mindfulness and rationality, they might really go crazy, because after such an experience, nothing is the same as before. The way you view people in the world is no longer the same, but you are the only one who has seen things like this. Your whole sense of reality changes. The way you think about things alters – when other people think in one way, you think in another. They talk about things one way, you another. While they go up that way, you go down this way. You are no longer the same as other human beings. From then on you have this experience often and it can last for a long time.

Try it out for yourselves. If you have this kind of experience in your practice, you won't have to go looking for anything far away; just keep observing the mind. At this level, the mind is at its boldest and most confident. This is the power and energy of the mind. It's much more powerful than you'd ever expect.

This is the power of *samadhi*. At this stage it is still just the power that the mind derives from *samadhi* alone. If *samadhi* reaches this level, it is at its deepest and strongest. It's no longer a matter of controlling the mind through suppression or momentary periods of concentration. It has reached its peak. If you were to use such concentration as a basis for practicing *vipassana*, you would be able to contemplate fluently. From here onwards it could be used in other ways, such as to develop psychic powers or perform miraculous feats. Different ascetics and religious practitioners use such concentration in various ways, such as casting spells and making Holy Water, charms and talismans. Having reached this point, the mind can be used and developed in many different ways and each might be good in its own way, but it's the kind of good like a good drink: once you've had it you become intoxicated. That kind of good is ultimately of little use.

The calm mind is like a resting place for the practitioner. The Buddha rested here as it forms the base from which to practice *vipassana* and to contemplate the truth. At this point you only need to maintain a modest level of *samadhi*, your main function is to direct your attention to observing the conditions of the world around you. You contemplate steadily the process of cause and effect. Using the clarity of the mind, you reflect on all the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations you experience, and how they give rise to different moods: good, bad, pleasant or unpleasant. It's as if someone were to climb up a mango tree and shake the fruit down while you wait underneath to collect up all those that fall. You reject any mangoes which are rotten, keeping only the good ones. That way, you don't have to expend much energy, because rather than climbing the tree yourself, you simply wait to collect the mangoes at the bottom.

This means that when the mind is calm, all the mind-objects you experience bring you knowledge and understanding. Because there is awareness, you are no longer creating or proliferating around these things. Success and failure, good reputation and bad reputation, praise and criticism, happiness and suffering, all come and go by themselves. With a clear, still mind that is endowed with insight, it's interesting to sift through them and sort them out. All these mind-objects which you experience – whether it's the praise, criticism or things that you hear from other people, or any of the other kinds of happiness and suffering which you experience – become a source of benefit for you. Because someone else has climbed up the mango tree and is shaking it to make the mangoes fall down to you. You can gather them up at leisure. You don't have to fear anything – why should you fear anything when it's someone else who is up the tree, shaking the mangoes down for you? All forms of gain and loss, good reputation and bad reputation, praise and criticism, happiness and suffering, are like the mangoes which fall down on you. The calm mind forms the basis for your contemplation, as you gather them up. With mindfulness, you know which fruits are good and which are rotten. This practice of reflection, based on the foundation of calm, is what gives rise to *panna* and *vipassana*. It's not something that has to be created or concocted – if there is genuine insight, then the practice of *vipassana* will follow automatically, without you having to invent names or labels for it. If there is a small amount of clarity, this gives rise to small *vipassana*; if it's deeper insight, it is 'medium *vipassana*'. If there is complete knowledge and insight into the truth of the way things are, it is 'complete *vipassana*'. The practice of *vipassana* is a matter of *panna*. It's difficult. You can't do it just like that. It must proceed from a mind that already has achieved a certain level of calm. Once this is established, *vipassana* develops naturally with the use of *panna* – it's not something you can force on the mind.

As a result of his experience, the Buddha taught that the practice has to develop naturally, according to conditions. Having reached this level, you allow things to develop according to your accumulated wholesome *kamma* and *parami*. This doesn't mean you stop putting effort into the practice, but that you continue with the understanding that whether you progress swiftly or slowly, it's not something you can force. It's like planting a tree, it knows by itself the appropriate pace to grow at. If you crave to get quick results, see that as delusion. Even if you want it to grow slowly, see that as delusion also. As with planting the tree, only when you do the practice will you get the result. If you plant a chilly bush for instance, your duty is simply to dig the hole, plant the seeding, give it water and fertilizer and protect it from insects. This is your job, your part of it. Then it's a matter of trust. For the chilly plant, how it grows is its own affair – it's not your business. You can't go pulling at it to make it grow faster. Nature doesn't work like that. Your job is just to water it and give it fertilizer.

When you practice like this, there's not much suffering. Whether you reach enlightenment in this lifetime or the next, is not important. If you have faith and confidence in the efficacy of the practice, then whether you progress quickly or slowly, can be left up to your accumulated good *kamma*, spiritual qualities and *parami*. If you see it this way, you feel at ease with the practice. It's like when you are driving a horse and cart, you don't put the cart before the horse. Before you were putting the cart before the horse. Or if you were ploughing a field, you would be walking ahead of the buffalo, in other words, the mind would have been restless and impatient to get quick results. But once you reflect like this and are practicing accordingly, you no longer walk ahead of the buffalo, you walk behind.

So, with the chilly plant you bring water and fertilizer and chase away any ants or termites that come. Just that much is enough for it to grow into a beautiful bush by itself. Once the plant is flourishing, it's not your business to try and force it to flower right away. Don't practice that way. It's just creating suffering for no reason. The chilly plant grows according to its own nature. Once it flowers, don't try to force it to produce seeds right away. It won't work and you'll

just suffer. That's really suffering. When you understand this, it means you know your own part in the practice and you know the part of the mind-objects and defilements. Each has its own separate part to play. The mind knows its role and the work it has to do. As long as the mind doesn't understand what its job is, it will always try and force the chilly plant to grow up, flower and produce chilly peppers, all in the same day. That is nothing other than *samudaya* – the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering.

If you have had insight into this, it means you know when the mind is deluded and goes off. Once you know the correct way to practice, you can let go and allow things to follow naturally in accordance with your accumulated wholesome *kamma*, spiritual qualities and *parami*. You simply keep practicing without having to worry about how long it will take. You don't have to worry whether it will take one hundred or one thousand lives before you get enlightened. Whichever life it will be, it doesn't really matter, you just continue practicing at whatever pace you can be at ease with.

Once the mind has entered the stream it cannot turn back. It has gone beyond even the smallest evil action. The Buddha taught that the mind of the *sotapanna* (stream-enterer) has inclined or entered into the stream of Dhamma and cannot return. Those who have practiced to this point can no longer fall back and be born into the *apaya* realms or the hell realms again. How could they possibly fall back when, having clearly seen the harm and danger, they have already cut off the roots of all unwholesome *kamma*. They are no longer able to commit unwholesome acts of body and speech. Once they have refrained from committing unwholesome acts of body and speech, how can they possibly fall into *apaya* realms or the hell realms? Their minds have entered the stream. Once the mind has entered the stream through meditation, you know your duty and the work you have to do. You know the path of practice and how it progresses. You know when to exert and when to relax in the practice. You know the body and you know the mind. You know materiality and mentality. Those things which should be let go of and abandoned, you let go of and abandon them, without getting caught in doubt and uncertainty.

In the past, I didn't use such a great amount of detailed knowledge and refined theory in my practice. The important thing was to gain clear understanding and refine the practice within the mind itself. If I looked at my own or anyone else's physical form and found there was attraction to it, I would seek out the cause for that attraction. I contemplated the body and analyzed it into its component parts: *kesa* (hair of the head), *loma* (hair of the body), *nakha* (nails), *danta* (teeth), *taco* (skin) and so on. The Buddha taught to contemplate the different parts of the body, over and over again.

Separate them, pull them apart, peel the skin off and incinerate it all. Keep meditating like this, until the mind is still, firm and unwavering in its meditation on the unattractiveness of the body. When you are walking on alms round, for instance, and see other monks or lay people ahead, visualize them as corpses, tottering along the road in front of you. As you walk, keep putting effort into this practice, taking the mind deeper and deeper into the contemplation on the impermanence of the body. If you see a young woman and are attracted by her, contemplate the image of a corpse which is rotten and putrid from the process of decomposition. Contemplate like this on every occasion, so that the mind maintains a sense of distance, not becoming infatuated with that attractiveness. If you practice in this way, the attractiveness will not last long, because you see the truth very clearly, no longer doubting the truth that the body is really something which is rotting and decomposing.

Use this kind of reflection until the perception of unattractiveness becomes clearly fixed in the mind, and it goes beyond doubt. Wherever you go it won't be wasted. You must really determine to do this practice to the point where whenever you see someone, it's exactly the same as if you were actually looking at a corpse. When you see a woman, you see her as a corpse; when you see a man you see him as a corpse; and you see yourself as a corpse in just the same way. In the end, everybody becomes a corpse. You have to put as much effort into this contemplation as you can. Train yourself until it becomes part of the mind. It's actually quite enjoyable – if you really do it. But if you just become absorbed in reading lots of books, it's difficult to get results. You have to practice sincerely and with real determination so that the *kammatthana* becomes established as an integral part of the mind.

Studying the *Abhidhamma* can be beneficial, but you have to do it without getting attached to the books. The correct way to study is to make it clear in the mind that you are studying for the realization of truth and to transcend suffering. These days there are many different teachers of *vipassana* and many different methods to choose from, but actually, the practice of *vipassana* isn't such an easy thing to do. You can't go and do it just like that, it has to develop out of a strong foundation in *sila*. Try it out. Moral discipline, training rules and guidelines for behavior are a necessary part of the practice – if your actions and speech are untrained and undisciplined, it's like skipping over part of *magga* and you won't meet with success. Some people say you don't need to practice *samatha*, you can go straight into *vipassana*, but people who speak like that tend to be lazy and want to get results without expending any effort. They say that keeping *sila* isn't important to the practice, but really, practicing *sila* in itself is already quite difficult and not something you can

do casually. If you were to skip the *sila*, then of course the whole practice would seem comfortable and convenient. It would be nice if whenever the practice involved a bit of difficulty you could just skip over it – everybody likes to avoid the difficult bits.

There was once a monk who came here and asked permission to stay with me, saying that he was interested in the practice. He inquired about the monastic regulations and discipline here, so I explained that in this monastery we practice according to the *Vinaya* (Code of Discipline) and that the monks can't keep personal funds of money or stores of requisites. He said that he practiced non-attachment. I said that I didn't know how he practiced or what he meant by that. Then he asked whether he could use money, if he didn't attach or giving any special importance to it. I said he could use it, in the same way as he could use any salt which he could find that wasn't salty. The monk was really just trying to impress people with the way he talked, but actually, he was too lazy to bother practicing with what he saw as lots of trifling and unnecessarily meticulous rules which to him just made life difficult. If ever he could find some salt which didn't taste salty, I would be ready to believe him. If it really wasn't salty, he should bring a whole basket full and try eating it! Could it really not be salty? Non-attachment is not something which can be experienced simply through talking about it or trying to guess what it's like. It's not like that. Having displayed his views on the practice in that way, it became clear that the monk would be unable to live here, so he left and went on his own way.

You have to keep putting forth effort into the practice of *sila* and the various *dhutanga* practices. It's not different for lay people either. Even if you are living at home, at the very least keep the five precepts. Try to compose and discipline your speech and actions. Keep putting forth your best effort, and your practice will gradually progress.

Don't give up the practice of *samatha* just because you have tried it a few times and found that the mind doesn't get calm. That's the wrong way to go about it. You really have to train yourself over a long period of time. Why does it have to take so long? Think about it. How many years have you let pass by without practicing? When thoughts arise pulling the mind in one direction, you rush after them, when they start pulling it in another, you still rush after them with your mental proliferation. If you are going to try and stop the flow of the mind and make it stay still, right there in the present moment, a couple of months is just not long enough. Contemplate this. Think about what it might take to have a mind which is at peace with the flow of the different issues and events which affect it and is at peace with the mind-objects it experiences. When you first start to practice, the mind has so little steadiness that as soon as it comes into contact with a mind-object, it gets agitated and confused. Why does it get agitated? Because it's under the influence of *tanha*. You don't want it to think. You don't want it to experience any mind-objects. This not wanting is a form of craving. It's *vibhava-tanha* (craving for non-existence). The more you desire not to experience any agitation and confusion, the more you encourage and usher it in. 'I don't want this impingement, why does it come? I don't want the mind to be agitated, why is it like this?' That's it – there's craving for the mind to be in a peaceful state. It's because you don't know your own mind. That's all. You persist in getting caught up with the mind and its craving, and yet it takes an incredibly long time before you realize where you are going wrong. When you think about it clearly, you can see that all this distraction and agitation comes because you tell it to come! There is craving for it to be otherwise; there is craving for it to be peaceful; there is craving for the mind not to be restless and agitated. That's the point – it's all craving, the whole mass of it.

Well, never mind! Just get on with your own practice. Whenever you experience a mind-object, contemplate it. Throw it into one of the three 'pits' of *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anatta* in your meditation and reflect on it. Generally, when we experience a mind-object it stimulates thinking. The thinking is in reaction to the experience of the mind-object. The nature of ordinary thinking and *panna* is very different. The nature of ordinary thinking is to carry on without stopping. The mind-objects you experience lead you off in different directions and your thoughts just follow along. The nature of *panna* is to stop the proliferation, to still the mind, so that it doesn't go anywhere. You are simply the knower and receiver of things. As you experience different mind-objects, which in turn give rise to different moods, you maintain awareness of the process and ultimately, you can see that all the thinking and proliferating, worrying and judging, is entirely devoid of any real substance or self. It is all *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anatta*. The way to practice, is to cut off all the proliferation right at its base and see that it all comes under the headings of the three characteristics. As a result it will weaken and lose its power. Next time when you are sitting in meditation and it comes up, or whenever you experience agitation like that you contemplate it, you keep observing and checking the mind.

You can compare it with looking after water buffalo. There is a buffalo, its owner and some rice plants. Now normally, buffaloes like to eat rice plants; rice plants are buffalo food. Your mind is like the buffalo, the mind-objects which you experience are like the rice plants. That part of the mind which is 'that which knows' is like the owner of the buffalo. The practice isn't really any different from this. Consider it. What do you do when you are looking after a water buffalo? You let it wander freely, but try to keep an eye on it the whole time. If it walks too near the rice plants, you shout a warning and when the buffalo hears, it should stop and come back. However, you can't be careless. If it's stubborn and doesn't take heed of your warnings you have to take a stick and give it a good whack, then it won't dare to

go anywhere near the rice plants. But don't get caught taking a siesta. If you can't resist taking a nap, the rice plants will be finished for sure.

Practice is similar. When you are watching your mind, it's that which knows' that actually does the watching. 'Those who watch over their minds will free themselves from Mara's' trap.' But it's puzzling: the mind is the same mind. It's knowing of the state of mind; knowing as the mind experiences mind-objects. This aspect of the mind which knows is what the Buddha referred to as 'that which knows'. The knowing is the one who watches over the mind. It is from the knowing that *panna* arises. The mind manifests as thinking and ideas. If it meets a mind-object, it will stop off and spend some time with it. If it meets another object then it will spend some time with that, just like that buffalo stopping off to nibble some rice plants. Wherever it wanders to, you have to keep an eye on it the whole time, ensuring that it won't slip away from your sight. If it strays near the rice plants and doesn't take any notice when you shout a warning, you must show it the stick right away, with no messing about. To train it, you have to give it a hard time and make it go against the flow of it's desires.

Training the mind is the same. Normally, when it contacts a mind-object, the mind will immediately grab hold of it. As it grabs hold of mind-objects, 'that which knows' has to teach it. Using wise reflection, you have to train the mind to contemplate each object in the light of whether it is wholesome or unwholesome. When you experience other mind-objects, because you see them as desirable, your mind rushes to grasp at them. So that which knows' has to teach it over and over again, using wise reflection, until it is able to cast them aside. This is how you can develop the calmness of the mind. You will come to see that whatever you grasp hold of is inherently undesirable. The result is that the mind stops right there without any further proliferation. It loses any desire to pursue such objects, because it has come under a constant barrage of insults and criticism. You really have to give it a hard time. You have to torture it until the words penetrate to your very heart. That is the way to train the mind.

Ever since I went into the forest to practice, I trained in that way. Whenever I teach the monastic community, I teach that way – because I want you to see the truth. I don't want you just to see what's in the books. I want you to see for yourselves, in your own minds, whether you have been liberated from your defiled thoughts or not. Once you have been liberated, you know. As long as you have still not freed yourself, you must use wise reflection to penetrate and understand the truth. If you really have insight into the true nature of thoughts, you will automatically transcend them. If later on something else comes up and you get stuck on that, you must reflect on that and as long as you haven't transcend it, you can't give up, otherwise there can be no progress. You must keep working with the problem over and over again and not let the mind get away. This is the way I practice with my own mind. The Buddha taught: *paccatam veditabbo vinnuhi* – the wise ones are those who know for themselves. It means that you have to do the practice yourself and gain insight from your own experience. You must know and understand this very self.

If you have confidence in and trust yourself, you can feel at ease. Both when people are criticizing you, and when they are praising you, your mind remains at ease. Whatever they say about you, you remain calm and untroubled. Why can you stay so relaxed? Because you know yourself. If other people praise you when you are actually worthy of criticism, are you really going to believe what they say? No you don't simply believe what other people say, you do your own practice and judge things for yourself. When people who have no foundation in practice get praised, it puts them in a good mood. They get intoxicated with it. Likewise, when you receive criticism, you have to look inwards and reflect for yourself. It might not be true. Maybe they say you are wrong, but actually, they are mistaken and you aren't really at fault at all. If so, there's no need to get angry with them, because they aren't speaking according to the truth. On the other hand, if what they say is the truth and you really are wrong, then again there's no reason to be angry with them. If you can reflect this way, you can feel completely at ease, because you are seeing everything as Dhamma, rather than blindly reacting to your opinions and preferences. This is the way I practice. It's the shortest most direct way to practice. Even if you were to come and try to argue with me about theories of the *Dhamma* or *Abhidhamma*, I wouldn't join in. Rather than argue, I would just give you reasoned reflection.

The important thing is to understand the Buddha's teaching that the heart of practice is letting go. But it's letting go with awareness, not letting go without awareness, like buffaloes and cows who don't pay much attention to anything. That's not the right way. You let go because you have insight into the world of conventions and concepts and you have insight into non-attachment.

The Buddha taught that in the beginning you should practice a lot, cultivate a lot and attach a lot. You should attach to the Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Sangha* as firmly as you can. He taught to begin practice in this way. Attach with sincerity and determination and keep attaching. It's similar to his teaching on not envying others. He said that when making a living people should depend on the fruits of their own labors. You should support yourself from your own stock of cows and

buffaloes, and from your own land and fields – there’s no unwholesome *kamma* to be made when you do this. If you earn a living by taking other peoples property, you make bad *kamma*. Many people heard this teaching and believed it, so they made their living working their own property to it’s full extent. But of course this involved some difficulty and suffering. There was suffering because they had to work with their own sweat on their own property. So then they went to the Buddha and recounted their tale of suffering, complaining that if you own anything it’s just a source of complications and unhappiness. Previously, he taught them that their difficulties and hassles arose from competitiveness, trying to acquire things which really belonged to other people. So they understood that if they followed the teaching that they should make a living from their own resources rather than exploiting those of others, then all their problems would be solved. However, when they tried doing this, they found that in fact their hassles and difficulties still existed. So then the Buddha shifted his teaching to a different level. He said that in fact, if you attach to and give undue importance to things of any kind, it doesn’t matter whose they are, suffering is the result. If you touch fire in someone else’s house it’s hot; if you touch fire in your house it’s also hot – that is the nature of attachment.

The Buddha could only teach according to the level of understanding and wisdom of each individual, because it was like having to teach crazy people. That’s the way you teach crazy people – sometimes it’s appropriate to give them an electric shock, so you do it. As long as peoples minds are at such a coarse level, they don’t have the mindfulness or wisdom to understand the teaching. Having finished his own practice, the Buddha got to grips with our problems and would come up with various skilful means or teach people according to their circumstances.

In my own practice I tried every possible means of reflection and investigation to gain insight, I staked my whole life on the practice, because I had confidence in the Buddhist teaching that *magga*, *phala* and *nibbana* (enlightenment) actually exist. These things actually do exist, just as it says in the teaching, and they actually do arise through good practice. They arise from a mind that is bold enough to give the defilements a hard time; bold enough to reflect and train; bold enough to fundamentally change; bold enough to do the practice.

What does doing the practice mean? It means going against the tendencies of your mind. When your mind starts thinking this way, the Buddha has it go that way; it starts thinking that way, he has it go this way. Why did the Buddha teach about going against the grain? Because in the past, for so long, your mind has been covered with defilement. He taught that the mind is unreliable because it’s still untrained and has not yet been transformed by the Dhamma. Because of this, he said you can’t trust it. As long as it hasn’t merged with *sila* and Dhamma – because it’s still not pure and lacks clear insight – how can you trust it? He taught not to rely on the unenlightened mind because it’s defiled. At first it’s the servant of the defilements, but over time it gradually gets polluted and becomes defilement itself. So, he taught not to trust the mind.

Look at all our monastic regulations and training guidelines, they all make you go against the grain. When you go against the grain there is suffering. Of course, as soon as there is some suffering, you complain that the practice is too difficult and troublesome. You say you can’t do it, but the Buddha didn’t think that way. He saw that if there is suffering, it’s a sign that you are practicing in the correct way. But you understand that you are practicing in the wrong way and that this is the cause of all the difficulty and hardship. When you begin practice and start to experience some suffering, you assume that you must be doing something wrong. Everyone wants to feel good, but they’re not usually concerned about whether it’s the right way or wrong way to practice. As soon as you start going against the *kilesa* and the stream of *tanha*, it brings up suffering and you want to stop because you think you must be doing something wrong. But the Buddha taught that actually you are practicing correctly. Having stimulated the *kilesa* they get heated and stirred up, but you can misunderstand and think that it is you who have been stirred up.

The Buddha said it’s the *kilesa* that get stirred up. It’s because you don’t like going against the defilements that it’s difficult to progress in the practice – you don’t reflect on things. In general you tend to get stuck in one of the two extremes of *kamasukhallikanuyoga* (sensual indulgence) or *attakilamathanuyoga* (self-torture). Sensual indulgence means you want to follow all your mind’s desires: whatever you want to do, you do it. You want to follow your craving, which means you want to sit comfortably, sleep as much as you want and so on. Whatever you do, you want to be comfortable – that’s the nature of sensual indulgence. If you are attached to pleasant feelings how can you progress in the practice?

If you aren’t indulging in sensuality or are unable to obtain satisfaction through attaching to pleasant feelings, then you tend towards the other extreme of aversion, becoming angry and dissatisfied and then suffering because of it. That is the extreme of self-torture. But this is not the way of one who is training to be peaceful and aloof from the defilements.

The Buddha taught not to follow these two extreme ways. He taught that when you experience pleasant feelings, you should just take note of them with awareness. If you indulge in anger or hatred, you aren't walking in the footsteps of the Buddha. It's following the way of ordinary unenlightened beings, not the way of the *samana*. One who is peaceful no longer moves in that direction, they walk the middle way. This is *samma-patibada* (right practice), which means the extreme of sensual indulgence is off to your left and the extreme of self-torture is off to your right.

So if you take up the life of a practicing monastic, you should follow the middle way. That means you don't pay too much attention to happiness and suffering – you let them go. But at the same time you can't avoid feeling pushed around by these two extremes: one moment you are struck from this side, another moment pulled from that side. It's like being the clapper of a bell. They hit you from this direction and you swing in that one, back and forth, over and over. It is these two things which push you around. In his first teaching, the Buddha talked about these two extremes because this is where attachment has taken root. Half the time, desire for pleasant things hits you from this side and the rest of the time, dissatisfaction and suffering hit you from the other side. It is just these two things which bully us and push us around the whole time.

Walking the middle way means you let go of both the pleasant and the suffering. To practice correctly – *samma patipada* – you must follow the middle way. To walk the middle way, following the path of the Buddha, is difficult and involves some suffering. If you don't find satisfaction when your mind craves pleasant feelings, it's just suffering. It seems that all that exists is just these two extremes of happiness and suffering and as long as you still believe in these things, you'll tend to attach to them and get involved with them. It means that when you become angry with someone, you immediately start looking for a piece of wood to go and hit them with – there's no patience and endurance. If you like someone, then you like to spend your whole time with them, getting lost completely. That's right isn't it? You always tend towards these two ends, the middle way never gets a look in. But the Buddha didn't teach us to follow the extremes, He said that we should gradually let them go. This is the way of *samma patipada* – the way out of becoming and birth. It's the way without becoming or birth, without happiness or sadness and without good or bad.

As ordinary human beings who are still subject to becoming, each time you fall into this process of becoming, you fail to see that middle point of balance. You go rushing by, on and on, as if you're falling headlong and you end up attaching to the extreme of happiness. If you don't get what you want, you still meet suffering from the other direction, missing the mid point time again. Rushing back and forth, you don't come to rest at that point in the middle which is free from becoming and birth. Why? – it's because you don't like it. Getting tangled in becoming is like falling into a realm where you get savaged by ferocious dogs, and then, though you try climbing upwards to get away, your head gets pecked and torn apart by the iron beaks of demonic vultures and crows. It's like being caught into a never ending hell-realm. That's what the true nature of becoming is like.

So the place where there is no becoming and birth, humans don't really notice. The unenlightened mind fails to see it and consequently just passes back and forth over it. *Samma patipada* is the middle way which the Buddha followed until he was liberated from becoming and birth. It is *abayakata dhamma* – neither good nor bad – because the mind has let everything go. This is the way of the *samana*. One who doesn't follow this way cannot be a true *samana*, because they won't experience true inner peace. Why is that? Because they are still involved in becoming and birth; they are still caught up in the cycle of birth and death. But the middle way is beyond birth and death, high and low, happiness and suffering, good and bad. It is the straight way and the way of calm and restraint. It is a calm that lies beyond happiness and suffering, good moods and bad moods. This is the nature of the practice. If your heart has experienced this true peace, it means you are able to stop. You are able to stop asking questions. There's no longer any need to ask anybody. This is why the Buddha taught that the Dhamma is *paccatam veditabbo vinnuhi* – it's something which each individual has to know clearly for themselves. You see how it all accords exactly with what the Buddha taught and then you've no need to ask anybody else.

So I have talked briefly about my own experience and practice: I didn't have so much external knowledge or study the scriptures that much. By experimenting and investigating. I learned from my own mind in a natural way. Whenever liking arose, I observed it and watched where it led the mind. All it does is drag you towards suffering. So what you do is keep practicing with your own mind until you gradually develop awareness and understanding... until you see the Dhamma for yourself. But you must be utterly sincere and really determine your heart and mind to do it.

If you truly want to practice, you must make a determined effort not to proliferate or think too much. If you start meditating with craving to have a certain kind of experience or gain some kind of state, then it's better to stop. When you experience some calm, if you start thinking, 'Is this it?' or 'Have I attained that?' you should take a break and gather up all that theoretical knowledge and just put it away in a box somewhere. Don't bring it up for discussion. The kind of

knowledge which arises during meditation is not of that order. It's a completely new kind. When you experience some genuine insight, it's not the same as the theory. For instance, when you write the word 'greed' down on paper, it's not the same as having the experience of greed in the mind. This applies to anger in just the same way; the written word is one thing, but when you actually experience it in the mind, you've got no time to read anything – you experience it right there in the mind. It is very important to understand this.

The written theory is correct, but the Dhamma must really be *opanayiko*

(leading inwards). You must internalize it. If you don't internalize it, you won't really gain understanding or insight. You won't experience the truth for yourself. I was the same in my youth. I didn't study all the time, though I had taken the first three levels of exams on the theory of *Dhamma-Vinaya*. I had the chance to go and hear different teachers talking about their meditation practice, but at first I was heedless and didn't know how to listen properly. I didn't understand the way the meditation masters expressed themselves when they talked about the practice. They spoke directly from their personal experience, describing how they came to see the Dhamma from within their own minds rather than from the books. Later on, after I had done more of the practice for myself, I began to see the truth in the same way as described by those teachers. I was able to understand for myself, from within my own mind, what they had been teaching. Eventually, after many years of practice, I realized that all that knowledge which they had imparted in their teaching came from what they had seen and directly experienced for themselves – they didn't just speak from the books. If you follow the path of practice which they described, you will experience the Dhamma to just the same profundity. I concluded that this was the right way to practice. There might well be other ways to practice, but just this much was enough for me, and I stuck to it.

You must keep putting effort into the practice. In the beginning the important thing is to be doing it. Whether the mind is actually peaceful or not, it doesn't matter – you just have to accept it the way it is. You are concerned with creating wholesome causes. If you are diligent in the practice, you don't need to worry about what the results will be like. You shouldn't be afraid that you won't gain any results from your practice. Worrying like that just prevents the mind from becoming peaceful. Persevere with it. Of course, if you don't do the practice then who will gain anything? Who will realize the Dhamma? Only the one who seeks will realize the Dhamma. It is the one who satisfies his hunger, not the one who reads the menu. Each and every mood is lying to you; if you are aware of it happening just ten times, that's better than nothing. The same old person keeps lying about the same old things. If you are simply aware of what goes on that's already good, because it takes so long before you even become aware of the truth. The defilements are trying to delude you all the time.

Practice means to establish *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna* in your mind. Recollect the qualities of the Triple Gem – the Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Sangha* – and let go of everything else. As you practice right here, you are already creating the causes and conditions for enlightenment in this very lifetime. Be honest, sincere and keep doing it.

The nature of the practice is such that even if you are sitting on a chair, you can still fix attention on a meditation object. At first you don't have to concentrate on many different things, it is enough just to focus on one simple object, such as the breath, or the recitation of a mantra like *Buddho*, *Dhammo* or *Sangho* used in conjunction with the breath. When you fix attention on the breath, make a clear mental determination that you are not going to force it in any way. If you get disturbed by the breathing, it's a sign that you still aren't practicing in the right way. If you are not at ease with the breath then it will always seem either too short or too long, too gentle or too forceful and it won't feel comfortable. But once you do feel at ease with it and there is awareness of each in-breath and out-breath, you've got it right. This indicates you are practicing in the correct way. If it's not yet right, you are still deluded then stop the meditation and re-establish mindfulness on the breathing. In the course of the meditation, if the desire arises to experience different things, or you actually do start to experience different psychic phenomena, such as bright lights or visions of celestial palaces or other similar things, don't be afraid. Be mindful of such experiences and keep doing the meditation. Sometimes you might be meditating and the sensation of the breath totally disappears. It might truly seem to have vanished making you afraid, it's only your thoughts that have vanished, the breath is still there, but is simply operating on a much more refined level than normal. Once an appropriate period of time has elapsed, the sensation of the breathing will return by itself.

In the beginning you have to practice making the mind calm in this way. Whenever you sit down to meditate – whether on a seat somewhere, or in a car or a boat – you should be able to calm the mind right away by focusing attention on your meditation object. You have to practice to the point where, if you get on a train to travel somewhere, you should be able to sit down and enter a state of calm, almost immediately. If you have trained yourself this thoroughly, you will be able to meditate anywhere. It means you already have some insight into the path of practice and can use this as a basis for contemplating mind-objects: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas. Be aware of all the liking and disliking which you experience and don't make anything out of such mental-states. If you experience a pleasant object,

know it as pleasant; if you experience an unpleasant one, know it as unpleasant. These are part of conditioned reality. Whether they're good, bad or whatever, they're all have the same characteristics, they're all *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anatta*. Things that are uncertain, so don't attach or cling to them. This is a teaching or mantra that you should keep repeating to yourself. If you keep seeing these three characteristics, *panna* will arise by itself. The heart of *vipassana* meditation is to throw each mind-object which you experience into these three 'pits' of *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anatta*. Whatever it is, whether good, bad or worse, throw it into these three pits and very soon you will start to gain knowledge and insight. *Panna* will begin to arise in small amounts, which is what meditation is all about. Keep putting a consistent effort into it. You've been keeping the five precepts for many years now, so it's time to really put some effort into the meditation. You have to gain insight into the truth of things so that you can let go, give things up and be peaceful.

I'm not very good at having lengthy discussions about the Dhamma. It's difficult to put it all into words. If anyone wants to know how I practice, they should come and live here. If they stay here long enough, they will get to know. In the past I've gone around on foot to study and practice with different teachers. I didn't go to make other people listen to me. I went to listen to the various Masters teach the Dhamma, I didn't try to teach them. Whatever they taught I listened. I didn't go in for discussion – I didn't see that there was any need for a lot of discussion. That which was important and worth taking interest in, involved renunciation and letting go. The whole purpose of the practice is for giving up and letting things go. Ultimately, it's fruitless doing a great amount of formal study. Day by day you are getting older and older and if all you do is study the words, it's like chasing a mirage – you never really get hold of the real thing. There are many styles and methods of practice and I'm not critical of them, as long as you understand what the true meaning and purpose of the practice is. If for instance, practitioners are not keeping the *Vinaya* strictly, although they might not necessarily be going that wrong, I would say that they would find it impossible to attain ultimate success in the practice. It's like trying to bypass *magga* or skipping over *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna*. Some people tell you not to get attached to *samatha*, that you shouldn't bother with it and just go straight on to *vipassana*, but from my experience if you try to skip over *samatha* and just do *vipassana*, it won't lead to success.

Don't disregard the way of practice and the foundation which has been left for us by Tan Acharn Sow, Tan Acharn Mun, Tan Acharn Tongrut and Tan Acharn Chao Khun Upali. If you train yourself following in the footsteps of these Masters, it's the most direct way to enlightenment, because they actually realized the Dhamma for themselves. They didn't bypass the *sila*, they tried to be scrupulous and impeccable with it. Their disciples had the utmost respect both for the teacher and the monastery regulations and ways of practice. If the teacher told you to do something, you did it. If he said you were doing something wrong and you should stop, you stopped. These teachers taught to practice with determination and sincerity until you actually saw and experienced results in your own mind. As a result, the disciples of the great forest Masters had the deepest respect for and were somewhat in awe of the teacher, because it was through following in his footsteps that they came to see and understand the Dhamma.

So, try it out in the way I have suggested. If you do the practice, you will see and experience the results for yourself. If you really practice and investigate the truth there is no reason why you shouldn't experience them in just the way I've described. I say that if you are practicing in the right way – which means giving up, speaking little, letting go of views and conceit – the *kilesa* will be unable to gain a foothold in the mind. You are able to listen peacefully to those who speak what is not true, just as you are able to listen to those who speak the truth, because you know how to contemplate the truth for yourself. I say this is possible, if you really put effort into the practice. But it's not often that the scholars actually come and do the practice, there are still too few of them that do. I feel a sense of regret that many of my fellow Buddhists are like this and I consistently try to encourage them to get down to the practice and start contemplating.

That those of you who have previously trained as scholars have managed to come here and practice is admirable; you have your own good qualities which you can offer to the community. In most of the village monasteries around here, it is the study of the scriptures and the theory which is emphasized, but ultimately, they are studying that which just goes on and on endless, unbroken flow. They never manage actually to cut through the flow and finish. They only study that which is *santati* and *sandhi*, or that which gives rise to continued birth. If you can halt the mental momentum, you can really use your theoretical knowledge as a basis for research and investigation into the cause of suffering. Because the true nature of the mind doesn't deviate from what you have learnt in the books, it goes in accordance with what you have studied. But if you study without ever practicing, you will never really know. Once you have practiced, you can gain a deep and profound knowledge, actually seeing and understanding clearly in the mind those things which you have studied in the books. The important thing is to start practicing.

So go and live in a small hut in the forest, make the effort to train yourself and experiment with the teaching. It's better than just studying the theory. Practice discussing the Dhamma inwardly with yourself, living in seclusion and observing your heart and mind. When the mind is still, it's in a state of normality. When it moves out from that state of normality, when different thoughts and imagination arise, that is *sankhara*. These *sankharas* will continue to condition the mind, so be careful and maintain awareness of them. Once the mind moves out from the state of normality, it will no longer be

samma patipada. It will either go in the direction of *kamasukhallikhanuyoga* or *attakilamathanuyoga*. These two tendencies are *citta sankhara* conditioning the mind. If the conditioning is wholesome, the mind takes on wholesome characteristics; if the conditioning is unwholesome, it takes on unwholesome ones. The process takes place in the mind. If you are practicing awareness, closely observing the mind, it's actually very interesting. I would be happy to talk about this one topic the whole day through.

Once you are aware of the movements of the mind, you can see the conditioning process. The mind has been raised and trained by the defilements. I see it as being like a central place. These things which we call *cetasika* (mental factors), are like visitors which come to stay at this place. Sometimes this "person" comes to visit, sometimes that "person" comes to visit and sometimes someone else. They all come to stay at this one spot. All these "visitors" which arise out of the mind, we call mental factors.

The way to practice is to awaken the mind and make it "that which knows", waiting and watching over itself. Whenever a visitor approaches, you must wave your hand to forbid them from coming in. Where could they sit, when the whole day long you occupy the only seat available, your awareness being right in the centre, receiving all the visitors who come? This is what "Buddho" means: a firm and unshakeable awareness. If you can sustain this awareness, it will guard the mind. You simply sit down and establish awareness on this one spot, because this is where all the visitors have come to, right from the time you were just a baby throughout your entire life until the present. So you must get to know them all and this is how. You simply sustain "Buddho". All these visitors will tend to want to fashion and concoct the mind in various ways, conditioning your experience accordingly. These conditioned states which are produced by the actions of the visitors, are called mental factors. Whatever their nature might be or wherever they might lead the mind is not the important thing. Your job is to get to know these visitors who drop in. Whenever visitors arrive they will find that there is only one chair available and as long as you occupy it, they will have nowhere to sit down. They come with the intention of speaking with you, but there is nowhere for them to settle down. However many times these visitors come, they keep meeting the same person sitting in the same seat receiving guests, and that person never seems to go. How many times will they keep coming back? All you have to do is sit there receiving them and you will come to know them all. Everything that you have ever experienced since you first had knowledge of the world, will come to visit right at that place. You only have to know this much.

If you watch and contemplate the Dhamma just at this one place, you will be able to develop insight which is capable of penetrating everything. This is where you watch, investigate and contemplate for yourself.

This is just talking about Dhamma practice, I can't talk about much else. This is the way I talk about the Dhamma, but in the end it's still just talking about the practice. What's appropriate now is actually to do the practice. When you start doing it, you will meet with various experiences in the course of the practice. There are, of course, given directions to follow telling you where to go and what to do...if this happens, do that and so on, but often when you proceed and it doesn't work out well, you have to reflect and adjust your approach. You may have to travel a long way to come across a signpost, before you realize which is the right way to go. It comes down to the fact that you learn through making mistakes and through working with your experience until you become established in the right way of practice and you are beyond doubt. If you still haven't found the correct way to practice, you're bound to meet with some doubt or obstruction, so then you must keep prodding and poking right at the spot. Once you investigate, consider it from various angles, talk it through with yourself, this will really make an impression on the mind and you'll know what to do. If you really get stuck, you can consult the teacher, who has plenty of experience in confronting obstacles whilst training the mind and he'll be able to advise on the way to practice with them and get beyond them. Having access to a teacher can be immensely valuable – someone who's been there, who knows the terrain. Someone you can take your confusion to, someone you can discuss your practice with.

Consider practicing with mind-objects such as sound. There is hearing and there is sound – you can be aware of the sound without making anything out of it. Make use of natural phenomena like this to contemplate the truth, until the mind is able to separate the mind from the object. This distinction comes to be discernible because the mind doesn't go out and get involved with things. When the ear hears a sound, watch to see whether the mind gets tangled up or carried away with it. Is it disturbed? If you can know and see just this much, you'll be able to hear sounds without being disturbed by them. This is the cultivation and establishment of mindfulness right here, close at hand. It's not something you have to go elsewhere to do. Even if you want to avoid sound, you can't really get away from it. It's only really possible to "get away" from sounds by practicing. That means training the mind until it is firm enough in the practice of mindfulness to be able to let go when there is sense contact. There is still hearing, but at the same time you let the object go. In this case when there is mindfulness, this letting go is natural. You let it be as it is. You don't have to struggle to separate the mind from the object, the separation is quite obvious to you because you are practicing abandoning, letting go. Even if you felt inclined to follow the sound, the mind wouldn't go after it.

Once you are fully mindful of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and thoughts, you will see them clearly as they truly are in reality, with the internal eye of wisdom. They are dominated by the three universal characteristics of *annicam*, *dukkham* and *anatta*. Whenever you hear a sound, for instance, there will be immediate insight into the three characteristics in the process of having that experience. It's like you no longer hear it, you don't hear it in the usual way, because you see that the mind is one thing, the object is another. But that doesn't mean the mind is no longer functioning. Mindfulness is monitoring and watching over the mind at all times. If you're able to develop your practice to this level, it will mean wherever you are or whatever you are doing, you will be engaged in investigating the Dhamma. This is *dhamma-vicaya* or one of the essential factors of enlightenment. If this factor is present in the mind, it means that there will be intensive and sustained consideration and reflection on the Dhamma going on at all times, and this will gradually loosen and undo your attachment to body, feelings, perceptions, thoughts and consciousness. Nothing will be able to disturb or intrude upon the mind when it is absorbed in its work of reflection.

For one who is experienced and has developed concentration, this process of reflection and investigation take place automatically in the mind – it's not something you have to think about or create. The mind will immediately be adept in contemplation in whatever direction you point it. If you are practicing in this way, one additional thing that occurs is that once you have established mindfulness before you got to sleep, you no longer habitually snore, talk in your sleep, gnash your teeth or writhe about. If meditation is established in the mind, all of that disappears. Even if you sleep deeply, when you awaken you will feel like you haven't been asleep, and you won't feel tired or sleepy. In the past you might have slept snoring heedlessly, but if you really develop wakefulness, that can't happen. How could you snore when you don't really sleep? It is just the body which stops and rests. With this level of mindfulness the mind is awake at all times of the day and night. It is "*Buddho*": knowing, awake, clear and bright with its own inner happiness. At this level the mind has its own self-sustaining energy and is free of drowsiness, even though it doesn't sleep in the normal sense. If you have developed your meditation to this point, you might be able to keep going for two or three days without sleep. Even then, if you start to feel sleepy because the body has become exhausted, you can focus on your meditation object and enter a state of deep Samadhi immediately, and because of your skill, you might only need to stay in it for five or ten minutes to feel as refreshed as if you had slept all day and all night.

As far as going without sleep is concerned, if you are beyond worrying about the body then there is no problem, but you should know what amount is right. You should reflect on the state of the body and what it's been through and then adjust your sleep according to its needs. When you have reached this stage in practice, you don't have to consciously tell the body what to do, it tells itself. There is a part of the mind that is constantly prodding and urging you on. Even if you feel lazy, you won't be able to indulge in moods because there will always be this voice encouraging and arousing you to make diligent effort. You will reach a point where you can no longer stagnate, where the practice takes care of itself. Try it out. You have done enough study and received enough teaching already, now it's time to use what you've learned to train yourself.

In the beginning, *kayaviveka* (physical seclusion) is very important. It's good to reflect on the Venerable Sariputta's teaching that *kayaviveka* is the cause for the arising of *cittaviveka* (mental seclusion) and *cittaviveka* is the cause for the arising of *upattiviveka* (seclusion from the defilements or Nibbana). Some people say that it's not important and that if you are peaceful, you can live anywhere. That's true, but in the early stages of your practice, you should see *kayaviveka* as really necessary. One day you should try going to stay in a lonely cremation ground, miles away from anyone, or go up and meditate on some really desolate and scary place. Make the practice challenging the whole night through, so you know what it truly feels like.

In my early years, I also used to think *kayaviveka* was not so important. It was just an opinion I held, which didn't actually come from experience. Once I started to practice, I actually began to apply the Buddha's teaching to my meditation and realized how at first *kayaviveka* gives rise to *cittaviveka*. When you are still a householder, what kind of *kayaviveka* do you get? As soon as you step inside the front door there's confusion and complications, because there's no physical seclusion. If you leave the house and go to a secluded place, then the atmosphere for practice is totally different.

You must understand for yourself the importance of *kayaviveka* when you begin to practice. Once you gain *kayaviveka*, you start to practice and gain knowledge of the Dhamma. Once you start to practice, you need a teacher to give teaching and advice in areas where you still misunderstand, because in actual fact it's where you misunderstand that you think you understand correctly. If you have a skilful teacher, he can advise you until you see where you have gone wrong. It's usually in the very place where you thought you were correct, because your misunderstanding covers over all your thinking.

Some of the scholar monks have studied a great deal and investigated the texts thoroughly, but I recommend people to give themselves to the practice. When it's time to study, it's all right to open the books and learn the conventional theory and form, but when it's time to fight with the defilements, you have to go beyond the theory and conventions. If you try fighting following the textbook model too closely, you won't be able to defeat your opponents. If you truly want to get to grips with the defilements, you have to go beyond the books. This is the way the practice has to be in reality. The textbooks were only compiled with the intention of providing teachings in the form of examples. If you attach too firmly to the books they could even cause you to lose your mindfulness, because they were written on the basis of the *sanna* and *sankhara* of the writers, who didn't necessarily understand that all *sankhara* do is condition the mind. Before you know it, they're off down into the distant depths of the earth meeting with magical serpents (*nagas*), and when they come back up again they start speaking serpent language and nobody knows what they are talking about. It's just crazy.

The forest Masters didn't teach to practice like that. You might imagine the things in the books to be exciting and interesting, but it isn't like that. Our teachers showed us the way to give up defilements and root out our views, conceit and sense of self. It's a practice which involves dealing with the flesh and blood of the defilements. However difficult it seems, you shouldn't be too quick to throw out what you have inherited from these teachers of the forest tradition. It can be possible to get quite deeply deluded about the mind and the practice of *samadhi*, because in the course of practice, things which would normally seem unlikely to happen might actually come up, so you can't always trust yourself. What would you do in such a situation? I'm always careful about this.

In my first two or three years of practice I still couldn't really trust myself, but after I became more experienced in meditation and began to have some insight into the dynamics of the mind, there were no problems. Whatever manifests in the course of the practice, let it happen. Don't try to resist it. If you understand how to practice, all these things will cease harmlessly by themselves. They turn into objects for contemplation and you can use them as material for your meditation and continue in a relaxed way. Perhaps you still have not tried this out. You have done some meditation before, haven't you? Sometimes in the course of meditation, things that shouldn't normally go wrong can go wrong. For instance, you might begin sitting with a determination: 'This time no mucking about, I'm really going to concentrate the mind'. But that day you don't get anywhere. However, we like to make determinations in that way. Actually, I've observed that usually the practice develops according to its own causes and conditions. Some nights you might begin sitting meditation with the thought: 'Right, tonight I'm not going to get up from my mat until at least one in the morning.' Thinking like that, you've already put yourself in an unskillful state of mind, because in no time at all feelings of pain and discomfort will be invading your senses from every direction, to the point where it becomes so unbearable you might even think you are going to die. In fact, the mind sets a length of time for sitting quite naturally by itself without you having to estimate or establish fixed limits. There's no fixed point or particular time to reach in the practice. Whether it's seven, eight or nine o'clock, that's not the most important thing; just keep meditating, maintaining your equanimity and without forcing things. Don't be too compulsive or fixed in your views about things, and don't try to coerce the heart with over ambitious declarations of how this time you are really going to do it for certain. Of course it's at those times that things become all the more uncertain.

You have to allow the mind to relax. Let the breath flow easily, without making it too short or too long. Don't try to do anything to it. Let the body be at ease and keep putting effort into the meditation. A voice will come up and ask: 'How many hours will you practice tonight? What time will you stop meditating?' It will keep coming back to ask you, so cut it off: 'Hey you, don't interfere!' You have to keep subduing it, because all such thoughts are just the defilements in one form or another, coming to bother you. Don't pay any attention to them, just rebuke them: 'Whether I wish to stop early or late is none of your damn business! If I were to sit meditation the whole night through, it's not going to harm anybody, so just leave me alone!' Keep cutting them off like this and then keep practicing at your own pace. By letting the mind be at ease it will become calm and you will gain a better understanding of the power of attachment and how much you are affected by the tendency to create stories and give undue importance to things. It might take what seems like forever (maybe more than half the night) before you find that you can sit with ease, but this is an indication that you have found the right way in meditation. Then you will have some insight into how your attachment and clinging truly is defilement and that it exists because the mind gets caught in wrong view.

There are some people who will light a stick of incense in front of them before they sit down to meditate and then make a dramatic determination that they won't get up until the incense has completely burned down. Then they start meditating, but after only five minutes they feel as if a whole hour has passed and when they open their eyes to look at the incense stick they get a surprise when they find that it's still really long. They close their eyes and restart the meditation and in no time at all are checking the incense again. So, of course, their meditation doesn't get anywhere. Don't be like that, it's like being a monkey. You end up not doing any work at all. You spend the whole period of the meditation thinking about that stick of incense, wondering whether it's finished or not. Training the mind can easily get to be like this, so don't attach too much importance to the time.

In meditation, don't let *tanha* and *kilesa* know the rules of the game or what your goal is in the practice. The voice of the defilements will come and ask you, 'How will you practice? How much will you do? How much effort will you put into it? How late will you go?' It will keep bugging you until you make some kind of agreement. If you say that you plan to sit until two in the morning, the defilements will immediately start pestering you. You won't even have been sitting for an hour and already you'll feel restless and impatient to finish the meditation. Then the hindrances will come up and say, 'Is it so bad that you're going die? I thought you were going to really concentrate the mind and yet look how shaky it still is. You made a vow and couldn't keep to it.' Thinking like this, you just create suffering for yourself. You become self-critical and end up hating yourself. You suffer all the more because there's no one else to use as a scapegoat and blame for the mess you've got yourself into. If you make idealistic vows or determinations, you feel honor-bound to hold to them until you are either successful or die in the process. To do it right according to this style, you have to practice intensely, without letting up. Another way is to practice more gently, without making any fixed vows, though keeping up a steady and persistent effort to train yourself. You will find that sometimes the mind will become calm and the pain in the body will subside. All that stiffness and pain in the legs will disappear by itself.

So there is this balanced way of practice which means you contemplate everything that you experience. Whatever you do, contemplate it thoroughly and don't give up the work of meditation. Some people think that when the formal meditation ends, it all stops and they can take a rest, so they let go of their meditation object and stop contemplating. Don't be like that! Keep reflecting on all that you experience. Whether you encounter good or bad people, rich or poor, important or unimportant, young or old, keep contemplating everything. See that it is all part of meditation.

Contemplating and investigating the Dhamma means that you must observe and reflect upon the various causes and conditions which influence the mind. Contemplate the various mind-objects: large or small, good or bad, black or white. If there is thinking, then note that the mind is 'thinking' and notice how it is only just that much, in actuality. In the end, all mental impressions can be lumped together as *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anatta*, not to be grasped at or clung to. This is the 'graveyard' of all mind-objects. Throw them into these three 'pits' and you will see them in the true light of the way things are.

Seeing '*aniccam*' for example, is something which doesn't lead to suffering, but it has to come from contemplation. For instance, if you acquire something attractive and you are pleased with it, keep contemplating that sense of happiness. It's possible that you might use it for a while and then start to get fed up with it and then want to give it away or sell it; if you can't find anyone to take it off your hands you might even want to throw it away. Why does this happen? It's because *aniccam*. If you can't sell or get rid of it, you start to suffer. This is the way it is. After you've really seen this clearly in one dimension, no matter how many times it crops up you'll always be able to use that experience to help you to see beyond appearances. It's the same old story repeating itself. Once you've seen it once, you can see it everywhere.

Sometimes you experience sights and sounds which are unpleasant to the eye and ear, and that brings up aversion. Note that feeling of dissatisfaction and contemplate it. Maybe at some point in the future the feelings will change and you might start taking pleasure in what you previously felt to be unpleasant. The things you like now might have been the cause for aversion to arise in the past. It's like that sometimes. Once you realize and know clearly for yourself that all pleasant and unpleasant objects and experiences are *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anatta*, then you will not attach to them. You will naturally come to see all phenomena as equal, as having the same intrinsic nature, and view everything simply as Dhamma arising into consciousness.

Well I have just been talking about my experiences in the practice here as it's been for me, without wishing to make it anything special. When you come to talk about the Dhamma with me, it's my job to tell you what I know. But really it's not something you should spend all your time talking about, the best thing is to get down to the practice. Like when you call a friend inviting him to go somewhere with you. You ask him, 'Are you going?' and he says yes, so you both go off straight away, simply and without any fuss. That's the way to practice.

If you experience different kinds of *nimitta* during meditation, such as visions of heavenly beings, before anything else it's important to observe the state of mind very closely. Don't forget this basic principle. The mind has to be calm for you to experience these things. Be careful not to practice with desire either to experience *nimitta* or not to experience them. If they arise, contemplate them and don't let them delude you. Reflect that they are not you and they don't belong to you. They are *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anatta*, just like all other mind-objects. If you do experience them, don't let your mind become too interested or dwell on them. If they don't disappear by themselves, re-establish mindfulness. Put all your attention on the breath, taking a few extra deep breaths. If you take at least three extra-long breaths you should be

able to cut out the *nimitta*. You must keep re-establishing awareness in this way as you continue to practice.

Don't view these things as you or belonging to you. They are merely *nimitta* which can deceive the mind into attraction, aversion or fear. *Nimitta* are deluding and uncertain. If you do experience them, don't give them undue importance or rush after them, because they are not really you. As soon as you experience any kind of *nimitta*, you should immediately turn your attention back to examine the mind itself. Don't give up this basic principle, you will tend to get caught up in *nimitta* and can become deluded or even crazy. You might be so completely far gone that you can no longer converse on the same wavelength as other people. Whatever you experience, the thing which you can trust and be most certain about is your own wisdom. If you experience *nimitta*, watch the mind. It has to be calm, for you to experience them.

The important point is to see *nimitta* as not-self. They can be useful to someone with wisdom, but harmful to someone without. Keep practicing until you are no longer excited by *nimitta*. If they arise they arise, if they don't they don't. Don't be afraid of them. If your wisdom has developed to the point where you can trust your own judgment, you won't have any problems. At first you become excited by *nimitta* because they are new and interesting and there is a desire to experience them. You become satisfied with them and this is a form of delusion. You might not even want to become attracted to them, but it happens and you don't know what to do or the right way to practice, so they actually become a source of suffering. If the mind goes into a good mood because of them, never mind. Establish awareness of the good mood and know it as defilement and as something which is itself uncertain. This is the wise way to let go of your attachment. Don't try to do it by telling yourself, 'I don't want to be in a good mood, why is there this good mood?' That's the wrong way to do it. It's meditating with wrong view. It's going wrong right here, close at hand, not far away. There's no need to fear *nimitta* or any other aspect of the meditation. I'm just describing to you some of the things that can happen, because I have some previous experience, however, you must take this away and contemplate for yourselves whether what I've said is right or wrong. That's enough for now.

Source : <http://www.vimokkha.com/key.htm>